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In class today, we discussed the dangers of reducing *Corinne, or Italy* to simply a story of the oppression of one culture or gender by another. Self-awareness of personal biases as a reader seems to be one way in which such reductive conclusions can be avoided. This ties into a point made by Kari Lokke about de Stael’s writing and conceptions of freedom: “…she suggests, focusing a clear and self-conscious eye on one’s passions and desires, thus acknowledging their power and then, through an act of will, freeing oneself from them,” (26).

In considering the selection designated for close reading, I do acknowledge that my own bias as someone interested in feminist literary perspectives might make me predisposed to focus on manifestations of patriarchy and gender hierarchies. In acknowledging this, I hope to be able to not reject these interpretations, but to allow for other interpretations to coexist in relation to them.

One interpretation that threatened dominance in my analysis of both the close reading section and the novel as a whole was that of an antagonistic relationship between cultures. I feel that, in terms of challenges presented within the text, de Stael’s portrayal of Italian and English cultural traditions seems to encourage such a reading. In creating a contrast between the reserved nature of English culture and the uninhibited nature of Italian culture, de Stael seemed to be bordering on hyperbolic at times. While this contrast is essential to the plot, I felt that the close reading selection also offered material to support an interpretation of connectivity between cultures. This occurs in relation to discussion of religion, which is part of the cultural clashing of Oswald and Corinne. As de Stael writes, through the mouthpiece of Corinne:

Whatever you may think about external ceremonies and the many practices of your religion, believe me, dear friend, contemplation of the universe and its author will always be the pre-eminent rite…The world, such as it is, is certainly a mystery that we can neither deny nor understand, so the man who would refuse to believe everything he cannot explain would be quite crazy. But what is contradictory is always man’s creation,” (180-181).

This suggests that antagonistic relationships between religious sensibilities are largely constructed, at least in situations in which the core values described are in harmony. If this is accepted, it can be argued that de Stael is not offering the cultural and gendered oppression/antagonism as absolute, but rather as constructed. When, on page 182, Corinne and Oswald feel unity between all types of worship and religion, could this be interpreted to suggest that the text advocates for a similar attitude toward other cultural elements? If this is the case, it could be argued that *Corinne, or Italy* embodies plenitude by proposing the acceptance of multiple cultural perspectives and enactments. In the same way that Oswald and Corinne recognize different forms of worship being connected within a greater whole, could it also be possible to pose the text as encouraging the view of cultures as being connected in a similar manner, with the larger whole being not worship but life?

If allowing for the presence of multiple interpretations, such as this, it becomes more difficult to view *Corinne, or Italy* as a cautionary tale. Specifically, the idea of a cautionary tale seems irreconcilable with the idea of plenitude because it suggests a determinate outcome as opposed to possibilities. The possible interpretations posed in this paper suggest that the fate of Corinne and Oswald is not inevitable, but rather the product of constructed antagonisms and choices made in response to them. In light of such a reading, their fate is simply one possibility, making it difficult to say that such tragedy is absolute in any such situation.